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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine how well speech communication departments prepare graduate teaching assistants to teach basic communication courses. Questionnaire responses were obtained from 124 graduate departments of speech communication or theater on the number of teaching assistants, their responsibilities, the percentage of undergraduates taught by teaching assistants with sole or primary responsibility for the course, and the nature and extent of formal teacher training required for graduate assistants. The results indicated that two-thirds of the responding departments offered some type of formal training; slightly more than one-half of graduate assistants received instruction on lecture and experiential learning methods, as well as on curriculum development; and two-thirds of the training is of short duration--less than a full quarter or semester in length. The results do not indicate that all teaching assistants are being adequately prepared to teach. (DF)

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF SPEECH EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NOVICE INSTRUCTORS

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The basic communication course, whether it be an introductory course in public speaking, interpersonal communication, or group discussion, is widely accepted and praised as the backbone of speech departments on college and university campuses throughout the country. These courses are usually multi-section in nature and require several faculty members and/or graduate teaching assistants for staffing. Unfortunately, many of the teaching assistants have never taught before and lack the knowledge and experience to adequately prepare for these courses. Consequently, many novice instructors do not effectively communicate the principles of effective communication. Concern over this problem has most recently been expressed at the Eastern Communication Association's Basic Course Director's Conference.[1] Despite interest in this problem, and despite recent interest in course and teacher evaluations, little has been done to investigate how speech communication departments prepare their graduate students for teaching the basic communication course.[2] The purpose of this article, therefore, is to report the results of a survey concerning the theoretical and experiential training in speech education given to graduate students who are acting as teaching assistants or associate instructors.

1. The Eastern Communication Association's Basic Course Director's Conference was held at Central Connecticut State College in New Britain on October 13 and 14, 1978. One panel, "Orientation Programs for Instructors of the Basic Course," was specifically designed to discuss the training of graduate teaching assistants.

2. A thorough review of the journals in our field clearly demonstrates this void. While the authors found many articles pertaining to the training of speech teachers in the elementary and secondary school systems, they found only a few articles relating to the training of teaching assistants and associate instructors in the university system. See, for example, Joseph C. Rhea, "Internship in the Training of College Teachers of Speech," Speech Teacher, 9 (Nov. 1960) 304-307; and Art Pollock and Ellen Mopps, "A College Teaching Internship in Speech Communication," Communication Education, 25 (March, 1976), 165-166.

Methodology

In January, 1979, questionnaires were mailed to 214 graduate departments of speech communication and/or theater listed in the 1978 Directory of Graduate Programs in Speech Communication. Questionnaires were sent to colleges and universities in forty five states plus the District of Columbia. One hundred and twenty-four questionnaires, or 57.9 per cent, were returned. The questionnaire was designed to collect basic descriptive data on the training and responsibility given to graduate teaching assistants or associate instructors. More specifically, the questionnaire gleaned the following information:

1. the number of graduate teaching assistants employed in each responding department;
2. the relative responsibility each G.T.A. has over his/her class;
3. the percentage of undergraduate students taught by graduate teaching assistants with sole or primary responsibility for the course;
4. whether or not the department offers any type of formal teacher training for its graduate teaching assistants;
5. whether or not such training is required of all graduate teaching assistants;
6. the duration of the training;
7. the general content of the training; and
8. whether or not the training is judged to be adequate

Results

Each of the following tables describes the responses for individual questions. Responses to various questions are cross correlated with other questions to determine if trends exist. These trends are briefly discussed following each table.

Table One shows the number of schools responding to the questionnaire, the number and percentage of those schools that utilize graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to teach courses, and the number of GTAs.

TABLE ONE

Questionnaires Sent	Response
214	124 (57.9%)

Respondents Utilizing GTAs

Number	Percent of Total Response
102	82.3%

Distribution of Number of GTAs in Responding Departments

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 +
Number[3]	38	22	8	8	16
Percent	41.5%	23.9%	8.6%	8.6%	17.4%

Table Two gives the number and percentage of responses for each of the choices in the second question. The question read:

Do these graduate students (please check one)

(A)_____ have sole responsibility for the course including developing own course plans, syllabi, exams, and materials

(B)_____ have primary responsibility for the course while utilizing departmental course plans, syllabi, and/or exams

(C)_____ share responsibility with a faculty member and teach under his/her supervision.

The second part of the table compares the number of responses in each choice (A,B, or C) with the size of the school (as measured by number of GTAs).

TABLE TWO

Response	A	B	C
Number[4]	14	56	45
Percent	12.2%	48.7%	39.1%

Number of GTAs in Department

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 +
Response A	7 (15.5%)	3 (12.5%)	2 (15.4%)		2 (7.4%)
Response B	20 (44.4%)	12 (50%)	6 (46.2%)	3 (50%)	15 (55.5%)
Response C	18 (40.0%)	9 (37.5%)	5 (38.5%)	3 (50%)	10 (37.1%)

Judging by the responses, it is evident that almost half of the departments using GTAs give them primary responsibility for the course. It is also apparent that few departments allow GTAs sole responsibility. In comparing departmental size to the amount of responsibility, the results show little variation across departmental size, except in the very large departments.

3. Total response 92. 10 respondents left this blank.

4. Total response equals 115. This number represents multiple answers by 13 respondents.

Table Three presents the number and percentage of responses for the amount of departmental courses taught by GTAs. It also compares that information with the amount of responsibility given GTAs.

TABLE THREE

Part A. Percentage of Courses Taught by GTAs

	1%-10%	11%-20%	21%-30%	31%-40%	41% +
Number	43	21	9	11	13
Percent	44.3%	21.6%	9.2%	11.3%	13.4%

Part B. Percentage of Courses Taught by GTAs

		1%-10%	11%-20%	21%-30%	31%-40%	41% +
Responsibility	Response A	8 (16.3%)	2 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (15.4%)
"	" B	16 (32.7%)	12 (50%)	6 (50%)	10 (66.7%)	10 (76.9%)
"	" C	25 (51%)	10 (41.7%)	5 (41.7%)	4 (26.7%)	1 (7.7%)

The results of this question indicate that two-thirds of the departments use their GTAs to teach less than twenty percent of total departmental courses. This result is larger than expected. When the results of Part A of Table Three are compared to the amount of responsibility given GTAs, it becomes evident that as the percentage of courses taught by GTAs increases, their responsibility level is more likely to be primary rather than sole or shared.

Table Four presents data concerning offerings of teacher training for GTAs; whether or not such training is required, whether or not the training is required before a GTA is given his/her own classes, or if it is required sometime during a graduate program. The table also compares this information to the size of the department and to the amount of responsibility given to GTAs.

TABLE FOUR

Part A. Training Offered

	Yes	No
Number	70	32
Percent	68.6%	31.4%

Part B. Training Required

	Before	During	No
Number	52	15	9
Percent	68.4	19.7	11.8

Part C. Number of GTAs in Department

		1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 +
Offered	Yes	29 (60.4%)	14 (70%)	8 (80%)	6 (85.5%)	14 (82.3%)
	No	19 (39.6%)	6 (30%)	2 (20%)	1 (14.5%)	3 (17.6%)

Part D.

Required	Before	19 (65.5%)	9 (56.2%)	6 (66.7%)	6 (75%)	12 (85.7%)
	During	6 (20.7%)	5 (31.1%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (14.3%)
	No	4 (13.0%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (12.5%)	

Part E.[5] Responsibility Response

		A	B	C
Required	Before	2 (20%)	30 (73.1%)	26 (76.5%)
	During	3 (30%)	7 (17.1%)	6 (17.6%)
	No	5 (50%)	4 (9.8%)	2 (5.9%)

Essentially, two thirds of the departments offer some type of instructional training for their GTAs, this leaves close to one-third without any formal training. Out of the 68% who offer the training, virtually all (88%) require this experience. Parts C and D of this table indicate that as department size increases, training is more likely to be offered and required. Moreover, Part D of this table offers a slight trend which shows that as the department size increases, training is more likely to be required prior to the GTA being given his/her own classes.

5. Figures for this segment of the table reflect multiple answers.

Finally, Part E of this table presents an interesting result in that 50% of the responding departments which give their GTAs sole responsibility for their classes do not require any teacher training. It is also clear from the last segment of this table that a large majority (almost 75%) of the GTAs who have either primary or shared responsibility are required to take the training before being given their own classes.

Table Five presents responses related to the duration of the training and compares that information to the amount of responsibility given GTAs in that department. In the fifth question, respondents were asked:

Which of the following choices best describes the duration of the training?

(A)_____ periodic GTA meetings
(B)_____ a short course (less than a full quarter or semester)
(C)_____ a quarter (or semester) long course
(D)_____ formal training beyond one quarter or semester (for example, more than one course, or a combination of courses and workshops or meetings, etc.)

TABLE FIVE

Part A. Duration Response

	A	B	C	D
Number[6]	31	20	15	18
Percent	36.9%	23.8%	17.9%	21.4%

Part B. Duration Response

Responsibility	Response[7]	A	B	C	D
"	"	B	20 (50.0%)	16 (53.3%)	8 (47.1%)	8 (42.1%)
"	"	C	17 (42.5%)	11 (36.7%)	5 (29.4%)	8 (42.1%)

It is clear from Part A of the table that close to two-thirds of the GTAs receive less than a full course (one quarter or one semester) in instructional

6. Total response equals 84 reflecting multiple responses.

7. This segment also reflects multiple responses.

methods. Part B of this table indicates that the duration of the training is rather evenly distributed across the amount of responsibility given to the GTAs.

Table Six presents the number of responses and percentage of those responses for the following content areas in the GTA training course.

TABLE SIX

Number	Percent	Area
59	79.7%	General philosophy of speech communication education
29	39.2%	Educational theory and learning models
41	55.4%	Educational goal formation and/or behavioral objective construction
49	66.2%	Course outline preparation
43	58.1%	Course syllabi construction
41	55.4%	Lecture methods
40	54.1%	Experiential learning methods
40	54.1%	Unit and lesson plan development
71	95.9%	Evaluation methods (exam preparation, grading techniques, etc.)
71	95.9%	Discussion of problems encountered while teaching
68	91.9%	Techniques of criticizing student presentations

It is evident that evaluation methods, discussion of problems, and techniques of criticizing student presentations find their way into the vast majority of teacher training courses across the country. On the other hand, items related to curriculum development and course construction are given less attention.

The last item of the questionnaire asked the opinions of the respondents as to the adequacy of the teacher training offered to GTAs.

TABLE SEVEN

Adequacy Response

	Yes	No
Number	75	27
Percent	73.5%	26.5%

Here almost three quarters of the respondents felt their programs were adequate. The remaining respondents were not pleased with their programs.

Discussion

It is the opinion of the authors as well as other professionals in our field (see note 1) that new instructors in speech-communication should receive some type of formal training. The results of this study indicate that two-thirds of the responding speech-communication departments offer this training. While two-thirds is a significant proportion, it also demonstrates that one-third of all graduate teaching assistants receive no formal training. This study also reveals that slightly more than one-half of all graduate teaching assistants receive instruction on lecture and experiential learning methods as well as on curriculum development. Hence, slightly less than one-half of all GTAs are expected to pick up these techniques as they teach. Unfortunately, this does not always work out well for the graduate teaching assistant and his/her students. Additionally, this study shows that two-thirds of the training is of rather short duration (less than a full quarter or semester). Thus, the results do not prove that all GTAs are being adequately prepared to teach.

Since this questionnaire was sent only to department heads, there is a further need to survey teaching assistants and faculty members who are associated with teacher training programs to ascertain their opinions on the adequacy of these programs. Furthermore, the authors believe this is an important enough area to warrant closer examination by the regional speech associations as well as the Speech Communication Association.

As a discipline, we are interested in offering high quality instruction. It is therefore our responsibility to explore all avenues available in achieving this goal. Teacher training for new instructors is obviously part of this responsibility.